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AUTHOR Duhon, Gwendolyn M.  
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of teacher empowerment issues. Section 1, "Definitions of Terms and Concepts Related to Teacher Empowerment," focuses on "Teacher Empowerment," "Dimensions of Empowerment," "Three Views of Empowerment," "Issues Related to Empowerment," "Terms Frequently Used in the Literature of Teacher Empowerment," and "Strengths and Weaknesses of Teacher Empowerment." Section 2, "Implementation," discusses "How Power Is Created and Used" and "Who Defines Power." Section 3, "Strategies for Personal Renewal," focuses on "Primary Sources of Teacher Power," "Five Sources of Interpersonal Power That Can Exist in Educational Organizations," and "Areas Where Power Is Identified and Can Be Created: Personal Lives; Professional Lives (Classrooms; Schools; Within the Teaching Profession); and Community." Section 4 presents "Conclusions." Each section offers activities to help teachers understand the concepts introduced. (SM)

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## Teacher Empowerment: Definitions, Implementation, and Strategies for Personal Renewal

Gwendolyn M. Duhon  
Assistant Professor  
McNeese State University  
Lake Charles, LA

- I. Definitions of terms and concepts related to teacher empowerment
  - A. Teacher empowerment
  - B. Dimensions of empowerment
  - C. Three views of empowerment
  - D. Issues related to empowerment
  - E. Terms frequently used in the literature of teacher empowerment
  - F. Strengths and weaknesses of teacher empowerment
- II. Implementation
  - A. How power is created and used
  - B. Who defines power
- III. Strategies for Personal Renewal
  - A. Primary sources of teacher power
  - B. Five sources of interpersonal power that can exist in educational organizations
  - C. Areas where power is identified and can be created
    - 1. personal lives
    - 2. professional lives (classrooms, schools, within the teaching profession)
    - 3. community

### IV. Conclusions

Teacher Empowerment, p. 1

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## I. Definitions of terms and concepts related to teacher empowerment

### A. Teacher empowerment

- A process whereby school participants (teachers) develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems (Short, 1992).
- A point of view or mind set that produces behaviors which result in autonomy for teachers to solve local problems in an unencumbered way (Irwin, 1990).
- Power handed down to classroom teachers by someone above them in the public school's hierarchical structure (usually the building principal) (Klecker & Loadman, 1996)
- A facet of self-empowerment, in which empowerment is gained through professional growth and knowledge (Klecker & Loadman, 1996)
- The opportunities a person has for autonomy, responsibility, choice, and authority (Klecker & Loadman, 1996)
- ...Control over the work environment and workplace; being able to make one's own decisions and to have a say in budget, staffing, and scheduling decisions... (Klecker & Loadman, 1996)

Recurrent themes in definition of teacher empowerment:

- autonomy
- problem-solving
- responsibility
- growth (personal and professional)
- choice
- control
- decision-making

## Activity 1

Using the recurrent themes listed above, describe how these themes are reflected in your classroom:

- autonomy:

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- problem-solving

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- responsibility

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- growth (personal and professional)

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- choice

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- control

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- decision-making

curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

classroom management: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

professional duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## B. Dimensions of Empowerment

### 1. *Decision Making:*

- a. relates to the participation of teachers in critical decisions that directly affect their work.
- b. Participation in and responsibility for decisions involving:
  - 1. budgets
  - 2. teacher selection
  - 3. scheduling
  - 4. curriculum
  - 5. other programmatic areas
- c. confirms to teachers that they have good ideas and are trusted to make decisions
- d. improves the quality of the problem-solving capacity of teachers

### 2. *Professional Growth:*

- a. refers to teachers' perceptions that the school in which they work provides them with opportunities to grow and develop professionally, to learn continuously, and to expand one's own skills through the work life of the school.
- b. enables teachers to become more knowledgeable about teaching and assisting them in developing a repertoire of strategies to teach is requisite for empowering teachers.
- c. builds teacher commitment and improves instruction through increased teacher skill.

### 3. *Status:*

- a. refers to teacher perceptions that they have professional respect and admiration from colleagues.
- b. Is affected by the powerlessness that is characteristic of bureaucratic organizations.

### 4. *Self-Efficacy:*

- a. refers to teachers' perceptions that they have the skills and ability to help students learn, are competent in building effective programs for students, and can effect changes in student learning.
- b. develops as an individual acquires self-knowledge and the belief that they are personally competent and has mastered skills necessary to effect desired outcomes.

- c. relates to teachers' subsequent decisions to remain in teaching.

5. *Autonomy:*

- a. refers to teachers' beliefs that they can control certain aspects of their work life. This may be control over:
  - 1. scheduling
  - 2. curriculum
  - 3. textbooks
  - 4. instructional planning
- b. is a necessary prerequisite for a sense of accomplishment.

6. *Impact:*

- a. refers to teachers' perceptions that they have an effect and influence on school life.
- b. Enhances teachers' self-esteem while creating the feeling that
  - 1. they are doing something worthwhile,
  - 2. they are doing it in a competent manner
  - 3. they are recognized for their accomplishments (Short, 1992)

C. Three Views of Empowerment: These are distinct theoretical positions about the importance of empowerment for instruction and achievement:

1. The Teacher Professionalism View: argues that teachers are in the best position to assess the needs of their students.

Assumptions of this view:

- a. Most teachers are
  1. well-trained,
  2. experienced,
  3. dedicated professionals
  4. possessing essential knowledge about curriculum and instruction
  5. able to develop their own strategies for bringing about success in their classrooms.
- b. Teaching and learning are processes involving substantial give-and-take between teachers and students. Instruction is perceived as the joint product of teachers' and students' actions.

2. The Bureaucratic Centralization View: is skeptical about the training, skills, and goals of teachers. Assumptions of this view:

- a. Teachers should follow a pre-specified plan that has demonstrated effectiveness for externally-defined goals
- b. More empowerment results in less effective teaching and lower achievement.
- c. There are some areas in which outside experts are better informed than teachers, and that decisions in their areas—but not in all aspects of teaching—should be made by administrators or others outside the teaching ranks.
- d. Teachers may be able to participate in curriculum design, but must be required to follow the curriculum once it is set.

3. The Loose Coupling Perspective: claims that schools are "loosely coupled", meaning that decisions occurring in one part of the school do not reverberate in clearly patterned ways elsewhere in the school. Thus, changes in teacher participation in school-level decisions would have little impact on classroom practice. An assumption of this view states:

- a. Teachers already have a high degree of autonomy about what occurs in their classrooms, so increased empowerment at the classroom level would be irrelevant to teaching and learning (Gamoran & Porter, 1994).

### Activity 2

Under the heading of each view listed, please choose whether you agree or disagree with the view and discuss your feelings about your choices:

The Teacher Professionalism View: Agree or Disagree

Why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The Bureaucratic Centralization View: Agree or Disagree

Why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The Loose Coupling Perspective: Agree or Disagree

Why: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D. Issues Related to Empowerment:

1. Creation of enabling experiences, provided within an organization that fosters autonomy, choice, control, and responsibility
2. Allowing individuals to display existing competencies as well as learn new competencies that support and strengthen functioning (Short, 1992)

**Activity 3**

List and discuss what experiences that could be created for teachers within our profession that could foster autonomy, choice, control, and responsibility in the following areas:

School policy and administration:

Teacher preparation and training:

Professional development:

E. Terms frequently used in the literature of teacher empowerment:

1. *Teacher Centers*: locations sponsored by the school district and a nearby college or university where teachers can learn about assertive discipline, critical and creative thinking, metacognition, and other approaches which will enrich day-to-day classroom management and inspire teaching
2. *Consortium*: a somewhat loose partnership between the schools, or between schools and institutions of higher learning or agencies to promote cooperation and sharing of facilities and resources.
3. *Collaboration*: formal association of the school with universities, businesses, laboratories, museums, or other storehouses of knowledge for updating teachers' acumen and skills in step with current practice.
4. *Linkages*: coordination of various units within the school or school districts
5. *Professionalism*: encouraging teachers to view their profession as worthy of high standards and respect; in order to become true professionals, teachers must aspire to achieve status by profiting from experience and honing their skills to a high degree, characteristic of workers in other professions.
6. *Ownership*: feeling of belonging in the school, willing to organize, manage, and assume the risk of an enterprise—to be entrepreneurs in the workplace as limited partners.
7. *Collegiality*: participating in an enthusiastic exchange of ideas with peers as opposed to airing complaints and dissatisfaction.
8. *Risk-taking*: willingness to try out new, creative ideas, to promote innovation, and to live with occasional failure.
9. *Listening*: training people to pay close attention to divergent ideas, to tolerate positions other than to their own.
10. *Mentor*: a friend and critic of new or experienced teachers; mentoring works best when there is a personal, psychological, and professional subject-matter match between the teacher and mentor; mentors may be other teachers or the principal.
11. *Isolation*: the condition of working alone in the classroom with only students as intellectual stimuli—this condition is common in secondary education.

12. *Context*: the full school setting—physical surroundings, subject matter to be taught, socio-economic and racial composition, skills and motivation of teachers, management style in the building, relationships between teachers and principals, teachers with teachers, community perceptions, internal and external pressures (Irwin, 1990)

- Principals may fear loss of power.
- Where one stands on the hierarchical ladder determines perceptions of teacher empowerment (e.g., superintendents may say that they support teacher empowerment, whereas principals may feel that superintendents actually do)
- Central office foot-dragging; limited funds
- When there is a breakdown in linkages among and between units and with the district (e.g., ordering and obtaining supplies) teacher empowerment is ineffective.
- Accountability and teacher empowerment may come into conflict in regard to goals and objectives; these are best left to the school district.
- Tradition: the public expects teachers to carry on along established lines in regard to course content, teaching methods, state and national test score achievement, grading
- Local politics also have an impact on empowerment efforts; lack of time and money impedes empowerment (Irwin, 1990).

## II. Implementation

### A. How power is created and used:

Power is created and used by an individual (teacher) who possess the knowledge about the instruments and processes through which one gains a voice in a given society (McQuillan, 1995). *That is, power is created and used by teacher who knows the way to having a say in how things are done on his or her school campus.*

### B. Who defines power?

The person defining power in the school setting is often the individual with the authority to impose their power or will on subordinates: Examples: Principal over teacher, teacher over student, student over student, etc. (McQuillan, 1995)

## II. Strategies for Personal Renewal

### A. Primary sources of teacher power:

The primary source of teacher power is found in the ability to prompt, influence, and guide the achievements of others through the teaching and learning process.

### B. Other sources of interpersonal power that teachers possess are:

1. *Legitimate power*: the dignity, trust, and responsibilities that society has yielded to its school and teachers.
2. *Position power*: power teachers derive from holding an exalted position afforded to them by society.
3. *Referent power*: the personal attractiveness and charisma the teacher possesses in the eyes of students and others.
4. *Information power*: part of the confidence which students and parents gain as they perceive the teacher's ability to act as a center of information. It is not so important that the teacher "know" everything, as it is that s/he is able to direct learners and parents to the source of

needed information or to find he appropriate resources in order to solve problems.

5. *Expert power*: the perception of teachers by their students and the students' parents as possessing the relevant academic and professional knowledge, the technical experience and expertise, the moral and ethical standards, and warmth and dedication.
6. *Connection power*: the teacher's clout or influence in the system; the political finesse which a teacher develops while working as an educator.
7. *Coercive and Reward power*: the bipolar power to be punitive on one end and the power to reward on the other (McQuillan, 1995).

#### Activity 4

With regards to the weaknesses cited in teacher empowerment, which of the following do you believe are based on factual, accurate information? Which do you believe are based on stereotypical, biased beliefs?

Weaknesses based on factual, accurate information?

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Weaknesses based on stereotypical, biased information:

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Ways to address weaknesses based on stereotypical, biased information:

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